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SUBJECT: SPLM Re-Assessing Darfur Initiative

REFTEL: Khartoum 960

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The SPLM is re-assessing its effort to bring together Darfurians after postponing its planned conference in Rumbek. Clement Janda, the SPLM's Task Force on Darfur (TFD) Chairman, was disappointed by the failure of key rebel factions to attend and the lack of support it received from the international community, particularly the UN/AU. The SPLM and the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) consider the Darfur issue important and appear committed to finding a way forward after last week's setback. The international community, particularly the UN/AU, could play a positive role in promoting the SPLM conference if it accepts the SPLM's approach--including a probably irreducible degree of uncertainty about how the conference will be structured and how the initiative will play out. It would also be useful if the UN/AU could state clearly what role it wishes to play in the SPLM effort, rather than asking the SPLM to define it for them. End Summary.

Reassessment

¶2. (SBU) Mission staff met with the Chairman of the SPLM's Task Force on Darfur (TFD) on June 20. Janda said that the Task Force would reconvene in Juba to reassess its strategy in light of the refusal of rebel leaders to attend and lack of strong support from the UN/AU and the international community. Despite this pause for reassessment, some activities continue. Justice and Equality Movement leader Khalil Ibrahim had been trying to reach SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum, Janda said. The TFD had also received

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a fax from purported Darfurian commanders assembled in Tripoli.

¶3. (SBU) Janda stated that the Darfur rebel movements were hostage to their external patrons. He lamented that the more initiatives there are the more factions emerge. GOSS President Salva Kiir traveled to N'Djamena, Asmara and throughout the region to encourage the outside patrons to promote unity, Janda said, and to discourage potential spoilers. The SPLM had worked particularly hard to push Eritrea toward a more constructive role, Janda argued. He opined that this has been misperceived, particularly by the UN/AU, as undermining the UN/AU role. Eritrea wants to improve its regional relations, Janda said, and cooperation with the SPLM on Darfur is a means to that end.

¶4. (SBU) The SPLM has a comparative advantage in attempting to bring the Darfur factions together, Janda continued. As a part of the

Government of National Unity (GNU) it has access to President Omar el-Bashir and the leadership in Khartoum, and indeed won Bashir's agreement that the Rumbek conference could go forward. The SPLM views itself as a facilitator, not a mediator, according to Janda. Despite membership in the GNU, its sympathies lie with the Darfurian people, and it can draw on its experience in overcoming serious internal divisions to help the Darfurians. The SPLM is not an outside group interfering, Janda said, but a Sudanese entity with an understanding of rebel movements. (Note: It is unclear just what kind of positive image the SPLM has among Darfurians, but it should continue to improve on this. End note.)

15. (SBU) The SPLM does not intend on replacing other initiatives or undermining the UN/AU, Janda emphasized. The plethora of competing international and regional meetings and initiatives nevertheless contributed to the refusal by the rebels to attend the SPLM conference, Janda said. If asked, the SPLM would attend the planned Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) meeting of rebel factions in Mombasa or the June 25 ministerial in Paris, Janda claimed. But the SPLM did not want to be in the position of approving or disapproving the efforts of others.

Frustration With Rebels, UN/AU

16. (SBU) Janda expressed frustration with the rebel factions, which all claim to control the most men and territory as they jockey for the most seats at the table. He explained that the involvement of the civil society in the SPLM initiative was designed to help mitigate the consequences of disunity among the rebels and provide input from Darfurians into the process. The involvement of civil society or political elites was aimed at making the process more representative and limiting the ability of the rebel movements make grandiose claims of their relative strength. He said that during the Abuja negotiations, the movements were unwilling and unable to name the locations and numbers of men under their control. Many

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so-called faction leaders have only one car or five men and a Thuraya satellite telephone. For outsiders, verification of relative strengths was difficult and required information from several sources.

17. (SBU) Janda said that the SPLM was disappointed with the international community for scuttling its initiative without giving it a chance to work. Only the U.S. and Norway committed funds. After receiving statements of support from the UN/AU and telling the SPLM to discourage bilateral donors from funding the SPLM initiative directly, the UN/AU then failed to deliver. In Janda's view, the UN and AU paid lip service to the SPLM initiative and were not keen to see it move forward. Janda predicted that without an initiative or effort being made in coming months to bring the Darfurians together, the rebel movements would disintegrate further.

18. (SBU) Ambassador Pascal Ngoga, Senior Political Affairs Officer, UNMIS, met with the task force on June 19 to discuss the SPLM's views on the break-down of the initiative and find a way forward. Ngoga told us on June 20 that Janda had expressed his frustration with the lack of UN/AU coordination and support. Janda complained that the international community told the SPLM to make "soup" but then disagreed over the ingredients. Ngoga said that the crux of the problem was that the UN/AU wanted the SPLM to define the role it wanted the UN/AU to play. UN advisor Abdul Mohammed expressed concern that the SPLM's involvement of civil society leaders could replicate or jeopardize the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation, according to Ngoga. He suggested that finding civilian and traditional leaders with ties to the rebel movements might make the SPLM's civil society concept more palatable.

Comment

19. (SBU) We do not view the damage or hard feelings caused by failure to launch the SPLM initiative as previously planned as

irreparable. Resolving the Darfur question remains a critical issue for both the Government of Southern Sudan and the SPLM, if for no other reason than Darfur directly impacts on the CPA and on international assistance for the South. Janda and the task force will reconvene in the next week to determine a new game plan. The outcomes of the ministerial in France on June 25 and the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue's gathering of rebel factions in Kenya might offer an opportunity for the SPLM to fine tune its approach and its place in the sequence of events leading to negotiations. Perfect clarity will remain elusive, however, and some degree of uncertainty about the structure and outcome of SPLM effort is probably inevitable. This setback has made it clear that coherent support among the international partners and the UN/AU is crucial for the SPLM's efforts to succeed. A consistent message to the rebel factions and their external backers that the international community, especially the UN/AU, views the SPLM conference as a necessary stop on the roadmap to negotiations would be helpful. For its part, the SPLM needs to engage the UN/AU at a senior level and agree once and for all the role the UN/AU will play in the SPLM initiative, and the relation between the SPLM's efforts and those of the UN/AU. We will urge the SPLM to do this in a timely manner, which would allow the international community to encourage the rebel factions to attend and pre-empt other regional efforts. End Comment.